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CONTENTS

I

PAGE

THE STRENGTHENING OF THE WILL,	3
---	---

*'It is God who worketh in you . . .
to will.'*—Phil. ii. 13.

II

THE STRENGTHENING OF THE CONSCIENCE,	29
---	----

*'A conscience void of offence to-
ward God, and toward men.'*—
Acts xxiv. 16.

III

THE STRENGTHENING OF THE HEART,	65
--	----

*'Wait on the Lord . . . and He
shall strengthen thine heart.'*—
Psalm xxvii. 14.

IV

THE STRENGTHENING OF THE MIND,	99
---	----

*'Bringing every thought into cap-
tivity to the obedience of Christ.'*
—2 Cor. x. 5.

I

THE STRENGTHENING
OF THE WILL

THE STRENGTHENING OF THE WILL

‘It is God who worketh in you . . . to will.’—PHIL. ii. 13.

WHAT is the Will? My Will is now at work guiding my thought into channels of written speech. A word is the creation of Will. Will has taken a fluid thought, and poured it out into the mould of a fixed expression. Your Will is now at work directing your thought to the act of attention. Your Will is hold-

ing your mind in a particular posture, and in that mental posture you can receive the expression of my thought. Withdraw your Will, your thought begins to wander. Continue the application of Will, your thought is steadily fixed upon the desired end. What, then, is the Will? It is the basal, fundamental force in personality. I cannot get behind my Will. I can get behind my thought. I can command my mind to think about to-morrow, and immediately my thought begins to play round about the

plans and programmes of the coming day. I can command my mind to think about yesterday, and immediately my thought moves about the doings of a past day. I can send my thought where I choose—here, there, or yonder. What, then, is there behind my thought? My Will, the sending, impelling, executive power. What is there at the back of the Will? There I cannot probe. Will is the ultimate force within me, the last element in personality, my real and inmost self.

Here, then lies the Will, the

basal power, the central force in personality. This fundamental power of Will controls my entire spiritual life. It works through all my faculties, and determines the measure of their effectiveness. Every man in an army feels the controlling and inspiring strength of his commandant. Let the commandant be strong, resolute, and resourceful, and every one of his men will be as batteries that are well charged with power. But let the commandant be forceless and indecisive, and the men of his regiment will be nerveless

and limp. Now here in my personal being I have a little army of faculties to which the Will has to be the inspiring and pervading commandant. If the Will be strong, all the faculties will work with firm and steady decision. If the Will be weak, all the faculties will work with timid and lethargic indifference. For instance, there is one member in this army of personal faculties which I may name conscientiousness. That faculty depends entirely upon the strength of Will for any measure of fruitful and effec-

tive application. For, take a man in whose character this combination is found — an organ of conscientiousness plus a forceless and irresolute Will, and what may we expect to be the result of the combination? If conscientiousness have a weak, timid, nerveless Will behind it, the result will be a perpetual compromise, a tampering with principle, an unholy yielding to the seductions of the devil. If the faculty of conscientiousness is to be exercised in prevailing power, it must be possessed by the power of a mighty and re-

sourceful Will. The effective power of a faculty is just in proportion to the indwelling power of the Will that works behind it. The sharpest instrument needs a force to wield it. The most exquisitely finished joiner's tool is impotent without a hand to grasp and use it. And so it is with the highest and most exquisite moral and spiritual endowments in the nature of man. They need a hand, a force, a Will, if they are to be used in any measure of strong and fruitful exercise.

Now it is very evident, from

the most cursory glance, that will-power is of different quantity in different lives. We express the difference in common speech. We speak of a man as having 'great force of character.' What do we mean? We mean that in all his conduct there is a pervasive and perceptible strength and firmness. Every trifle tingles with decision. The outgoings of his life do not issue with the languor of a falling feather, but crash through petty obstacles with the force of a cannon-ball. He has great force of char-

acter, which is only another way of saying that he has splendid basal power of Will. We speak of another man as having no force of character. Everything about him is characterised by limpness, languor, and indecision. We say he has no 'go,' no strong power of going! His Will is weak and resourceless, and all his life just creeps along like a half-exhausted electric car. Napoleon is one of our conspicuous examples of the possessors of tremendous power of Will. I refer not now to quality of Will. I

am confining the attention to quantity of Will, and I say that in all the expressions of Napoleon's life there was the terrific presence of an abounding and most indomitable Will. Take, on the other hand, the poet Coleridge, a man whose mental organism was marvellously exquisite, and whose power of Will was marvellously weak. The consequent result is a life that is only a mass of fragments, a huge accumulation of splendid programmes, which, for lack of a vigorous Will, were never realised in rich and

practical issues. So widely do men differ in the amount of Will-power which lies at the base of their lives.

Let us proceed a step further. Our Wills not only differ in quantity and force. They differ in quality and kind. The Will may be strong and bad. The Will may be weak and good. The Will may work through the faculties to achieve unholy ends. The Will may choose the faculties through which it will work, and may concentrate on these, to the determined and deliberate ex-

clusion of others. The Will itself may have an unholy bias, a godless inclination; and from this initial crookedness all the issues of life will receive distortion. The root of our being is the Will, and many of us are wrong at the root. The Will is bent from the line of rectitude. It is sinfully biassed, and from the strength of that bias our entire life bears the marks of perversion.

What, then, must be the first step in the culture of the Will? The perverted Will must be converted. The un-

holy bias must be destroyed, and health and rectitude restored. What are the functions of an upright and healthy Will? Perhaps it will be sufficient for our purpose if we seek to express them under these two simple divisions—the function of *resistance*, and the function of *persistence*. A healthy Will is a Will which resists all the seductions of evil, and persists in the pursuit of the good. When an evil suggestion presents itself, when some unclean allurement intrudes to beckon and to snare, a healthy Will is a Will

that will not dally with it, will not play with it, will not offer it the slightest entertainment, but will confront it with stout and immediate resistance. John Bunyan tells us that the beginning of the trouble for Mansoul was the moment when Captain Resistance fell dead ; for when Captain Resistance died, there came one, Mr. Ill-Pause, whose stinking breath so affected My Lord Innocency that he too sank down and died. A healthy Will is a guarantee that Captain Resistance is alive and at his post, and that in

the presence of some insidious temptation no opportunity will be given to Mr. Ill-Pause, whose poisonous breath is always fatal to the fair, white innocence of the soul. But it belongs to a healthy Will to do more than resist. It has a complementary function in following, in strenuous pursuit, the allurements of holiness and truth. A healthy Will has a resisting inclination away from all that is evil, and a persisting inclination in the direction of all that is good.

Now, how is that healthy bias or inclination of the Will

to be obtained? By an act of conversion, and that by the grace of God. There is no other resource. We shall have to go down upon our knees before the One who made us and ask Him to remake us. The answer to all such lowly appeals is effective and sure. Grace, with all that it involves of creative power, and condescending favour, and redeeming love, will take hold of the poor, crooked, perverted Will, and will convert it, changing a delight in wilfulness into a delight in doing the Will of God.

But suppose that the Will has been converted. Assume that its inclinations have been changed. Suppose it is now healthy, with a bias to resist the evil and to persist in the good. The Will may still be weak and infantile. 'To will' may be 'present with me,' but 'how to perform that which is good' I may not have found. The inclination may be present; the power to fulfil the inclination may be absent. The converted Will needs to become a reinforced Will, in order that inclination may equal power, and that power

may be commensurate with inclination. How may a converted Will be reinforced? Let us approach the matter on a familiar line. We know that spirit can influence spirit in spite of the encumbrance and limitations of the flesh. Rose-leaves, placed within a vase, can influence the atmosphere of a room, creating an odour which is pleasing to the sense. Can the spirit of man, placed within its vase of clay, create a moral atmosphere which it will be healthful or injurious for others to breathe? Your mind has immediately given an affirma-

tive answer. We cannot be in the presence of any man of great and holy force of character and not perceive his influence. How often one has heard a weaker man speak of a stronger man, and say, 'As long as he is with me, I feel I can do everything I ought to do'! If you examine the expression, you will find that it is a popular proof of the truth I am now enforcing, that one strong, dominant spirit can pervade a weaker one, and give to the weaker one a sense of confident and conquering might.

Now, let us lift up the argument to its highest application. If human spirit can work upon human spirit, and reinforce it by the impartation of its own strength, is it inconceivable that the great Creative Spirit can work upon created spirit, and impart to it its own unspeakable strength? Do you detect anything in the assumption which is belittling or degrading to an august conception of God? The rain-drop, hanging at the tip of a rose-leaf, depends by the same power as the largest star. And I am fain to be-

lieve, and rejoice in believing, that the ineffable spiritual energy which is implied in what we call the holiness of God, and which empowers seraph and archangel with endurance to bear the 'burning bliss' of the Eternal Presence, will also communicate itself to the weakest among the sons of men, and so hold him in his appointed place as to make it impossible for him ever to be moved.

But I need not present the thought to you as an assumption. I can present it to you as a gracious promise which

times without number has been fulfilled. 'God is our . . . strength.' 'They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.' 'I will strengthen that which was sick.' By patient communion with the Lord we establish ourselves by the inexhaustible springs. 'My springs are in Thee.' The Will, converted and convalescent, is made indomitable by continued fellowship with the Holy One. How vast is the gulf between 'how to perform that which is good I know not,' and 'I can do all things in Christ

who strengtheneth me'! What has changed an oppressive sense of impotence into the exultant consciousness of power? The answer may be best found in the Apostle's own phrase: 'The supply of the spirit of Jesus.' It was this which perpetually reinforced the converted Will. It was the 'spirit of power,' begotten by the supply of the spirit of Jesus, which enabled the Apostle to regard obstacles as ministers of gracious opportunity, and tribulations as occasions of sacred joy.

II

THE STRENGTHENING
OF THE CONSCIENCE

THE STRENGTHENING OF THE CONSCIENCE

‘A conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.’—ACTS xxiv. 16.

WHAT is Conscience? I have not created it. It is not an accomplishment which has come to me as the fruit of the years. I did not acquire the faculty at school. It was with me when I began to learn the alphabet. With the dawn of my consciousness Conscience dawned. It has been a part of my equip-

ment from the beginning—
an essential part of self, yet
not self-created. What, then,
is it? The Scriptures attempt
to define its position and func-
tion by the use of various
figures, of which let two be
named. The Bible speaks of
Conscience as a voice—a mys-
terious, ghostly voice at the
back of my being—a voice
which whispers guidance to
me, singling out some things
as things to be avoided, and
other things as things to be
pursued. And the strange
characteristic of the voice is
this, that its tone is not that

of timid counsel, of shy, reluctant, hesitating suggestion, but a military tone, of precise and imperative command. 'Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it."' That is one of the scriptural presentations of the Conscience—a voice out of the unseen, with authoritative power to control and command.

But the Bible also speaks of Conscience under another and quite different figure. The Conscience is described as a moral palate, by which I am able instinctively to

taste certain differences in character and conduct. With my physical palate I am able to perceive the difference in the composition of material things. I perceive a difference between vinegar and sugar, and I characterise one as bitter and the other as sweet. Now I am told that Conscience is a superior palate—a higher faculty or sense of taste—by which I am to appreciate differences among spiritual things. Without the Conscience all things would taste alike. The thing we call falsehood would taste just like

the thing we call truth, and the thing we call malignity would taste just like the thing we call love. But with the Conscience all things do not taste alike. I perceive there are some things which taste spiritually sweet, and others which taste spiritually sour; and, again, there is this strange characteristic, the perception carries with it a rigorous obligation, and what I taste to be spiritually sweet and good I am commanded to welcome, and what I taste to be spiritually sour or evil I am commanded to avoid. Here, then,

is a sufficiently clear and workable description of the Conscience, which is quite adequate for our immediate purpose. It is a certain faculty or sense or palate, by which I am compelled to discern certain broad differences in character and conduct ; and this perception is accompanied by an authority which commands me to forsake what to me tastes evil, and to foster and encourage what to me tastes good.

Well, now, is this Conscience universal ? Has everybody got this moral faculty—this

spiritual sense of taste? All testimony and experience leads us to the conviction that no one has been found without it. No race of people has yet been found, even among the most degraded tribes of the most unilluminated lands, to whom all kinds of character and conduct taste alike. They all recognise a difference, and place some things on the left hand as being bitter and evil—things that must be avoided—and some things on the right hand as being sweet and good—things that must be pursued.

I make no present reference to the quality of their moral perceptions, to the comparative bluntness or refinement of their tastes. I am insisting upon the extraordinary fact that everywhere, among all peoples, there is an inborn faculty or sense which compels them to recognise that all things are not alike, but that there are broad and essential differences in character and in conduct.

If, then, the Conscience be a spiritual sense of taste, accompanied by a mysterious authority, and if the faculty

be universal, let us now ask the further question: Is Conscience of differing power in different people? Does it manifest itself everywhere in equal strength? Is Conscience at work in all our lives with the same scope and intensity? Let us consult our common speech. I think we shall find that our ordinary speech bears witness to the fact that Conscience is of varying degrees of strength and refinement. For example, we speak of a man as possessing a very 'keen Conscience.' What do we mean by the phrase? We

mean a Conscience whose powers of perception are so sharp and refined as to be able to taste the rarest distinctions, and to detect the flavour of evil and of good even in their minutest presence. On the other hand, we speak of a 'dull Conscience,' a Conscience that cannot discern fine flavours—a Conscience that needs to have the sweet intensely sweet before it can appreciate it, and that needs to have the bitter intensely bitter before the bitter tastes repellent. A dull Conscience is one that

requires moralities and immoralities highly seasoned before its sluggish taste is aroused. These two distinguishing characteristics of 'dull' and 'keen' may suffice to indicate that in our common speech we recognise that Conscience is of differing quality in different lives, of varying intensity and scope.

This, then, is the point we have reached. Conscience is a kind of spiritual taste for the discernment of differences in character and conduct. It is universal. It is of varying power in different lives. Now

take a further step. Has the power and dominion of Conscience grown with the race? Has this moral palate become more refined and more discerning with the increase of the years? Or did Conscience emerge at the very dawn of the race full-powered and matured? Does the Bible afford any guidance in answer to these inquiries? It appears to me very evident, even if we confine our attention to the one line of revelation and of history unfolded in the Bible, that in the early days of the world the moral palate of man

was able to appreciate only very broad distinctions. Its taste was very loud. It was able to discern only among things that were very highly seasoned. It was unable to detect and appreciate the finer and the quieter flavours. Contrast the loud virtues of the early days with the mild-flavoured, exquisite virtues named by the Apostle Paul as being among the fruits of the spirit, and you will clearly see what I mean. A man may have a palate sufficiently sensitive to taste the bitterness of theft who yet does not

detect the bitterness of envy. And this indicates the difference between the Conscience of the early days of the race and Conscience matured. The majority of us can discern the difference between good tea and bad tea, but how many of us have a physical palate sufficiently refined to be an expert tea-taster, able to detect those more subtle and exquisite flavours which lurk not among the good and the bad teas, but among the better and the best? In the primitive days the moral palate was able to distinguish between the

good and the bad, but not among the better and the best. At the time of the giving of the law the palate had become so sensitive as to be able to appreciate the difference between purity and adultery, between honesty and theft, but not so refined as to be capable of tasting the more secret flavours of long-suffering, patience, gentleness, meekness and love. Along that line its education and development have proceeded, from fine distinctions to finer distinctions, and along those lines must its development be carried

to-day, from the appreciation of the finer to the appreciation of the finest.

Conscience, then, is the faculty or sense of moral taste. We all have it. We have it in varying intensity and power. It has been cultivated through the passage of the years. Does any responsibility attach to me concerning the condition of my own Conscience? Am I under any obligation in regard to it? Is it a sense or faculty altogether beyond my influence, or is it partially within my control? Have I the privilege and therefore the

duty of training it? How is it with the physical senses? Take the sense of sight. I cannot create it. Can I train it? The question commands an affirmative answer. The eye can be trained. I can so compel and direct its attention as to immeasurably increase its powers of discernment. I can compel my eye to gaze at a cloud, which has hitherto appeared quite commonplace, until the cloud stands revealed as an apocalypse of glory. I can compel my eye to detect and appreciate the beauties of a blade of grass. This is very

familiar truth, but from the plane of familiar truth we may rise into regions of less familiar truth. Here is the Conscience, a sense or faculty given to me for the appreciation of moral distinctions. I cannot create it, but I can train it to sharper and more exquisite appreciations. And because I can train and exalt it I can also neglect and debase it, and so to me and to all men there is attached the most solemn responsibility as to the condition of the individual Conscience: its health, its power, the scope of its exercise, and the ac-

curacy and intensity of its discernment.

Now, if this be a personal and inalienable responsibility, it would appear to be a wise and useful thing to inquire by what means Conscience comes to be debased, and by what means it may be exalted and refined. How, then, is Conscience debased? Let us first of all get a clear appreciation of the office and function of the Conscience. I have already referred to it, but let us glance at it again from a slightly different angle. The office and purpose of Con-

science is this—to make known to me what things are morally sweet, and what things are morally bitter; that is, to reveal to me what things are right and what things are wrong. Conscience reveals to me that a certain thing is wrong; but it does more than that: it warns me and commands me to avoid it. Conscience is therefore the supreme counsellor and commander in my life, and as such it demands the obedience of every faculty and capacity of my being. Thought must be directed according to Conscience. Ima-

ginations must be built according to Conscience. Appetite must be restrained according to Conscience. Feelings must be starved or nourished according to Conscience. Conscience must be the supreme arbiter, and to its imperious decisions everything else in my being must be subdued. I have often thought that the apportionment of the ancient city of Edinburgh is a fair and fitting symbol of every healthy and well-ordered life. There, in the lower part of the city, are the highways of commerce, the channels of trade. A little

higher are well - cultivated gardens into which a wearied body can turn for recreation and rest. Still higher are the colleges and seats of learning, where students burrow into ancient lore to enrich a present mind. And high above all there towers the grey old castle, and in the topmost part of the castle stands the time-gun, which every day roars out the royal time, the standard time, the standard to which the clocks are adjusted in the seats of learning and down in the centres of trade. It is to me a symbol of a healthy and

well-governed life, in which all the varied activities—the activities of trade, the activities of mind, the activities of recreation—are adjusted to the royal proclamation of the Conscience, enthroned on high above them all. That is the function of Conscience, to indicate the moral decisions to whose inexorable standard all other appointments must be conformed. The life of the fair city in the northern kingdom would be a motley chaos and disorder if every clock insisted upon forming its own standard, and the royal time-

gun were neglected and renounced. And chaos leaps into a soul when every activity claims to act on its own impulse, on that and on that alone: when mind claims to think as it likes, and lust claims to burn as it likes, and the imperial proclamations of Conscience are slighted and ignored. That is the debasement of Conscience, when Conscience is belittled, and its august indications are despised.

But now see how the debasement of Conscience proceeds. A man cannot despise

his Conscience for a year and then next year re-enthroned it as though the neglect and contempt had never been. A dethroned Conscience is not only a debased Conscience, it is a Conscience that is sorely impaired. Conscience can endure anything except rebelliousness ; but in the presence of rebelliousness it shrinks down into diminished strength. There is a striking phrase in the epistle to Timothy, in which a debased Conscience is spoken of as 'seared with a hot iron.' The meaning of the figure appears to be this :

Conscience has been seared as with a terrible heat, blasted as with the fierce lightning-stroke of some rebellious act, and its fine, soft, discriminating touch has gone, and it no longer feels differences where tremendous differences exist. There is another scriptural figure whose interpretation leads to the enforcement of the same terrible truth: 'Their Conscience is defiled.' Their Conscience has become infected with a horrible taint. Revert for a moment to the figure of the palate. There are certain things, of a very

searching and stringent flavour, which, if I eat, will render me incapable for a time of appreciating things of a finer taste. One strong flavour in the mouth will render another flavour imperceptible. I cannot imagine how any man whose mouth is saturated with alcohol can ever, even remotely, appreciate the flavour of the finest fruit. The mouth can be defiled by one taste to the absolute exclusion of another. There is an analogous truth in regard to the moral palate which we call the Conscience. It is possible for a man to so

persistently feed himself on the strong bitterness of evil, to so saturate his palate with an evil taint, as to render it incapable of true discernment. That is the teaching of the Bible, which is confirmed in the practical experiences of daily life. We can so defile the moral palate by persistent eating of evil things that at last a truth can be spoken and its delicate flavour never suspected: a lie can slip through and never be tasted: a blasphemy can be uttered and its bitter profanity never even be guessed. The Conscience can

be defiled, and for any debasement of this most exquisite gift we shall be held responsible when the Lord makes up His jewels.

Now turn the thought round to the other side. If Conscience can be debased and defiled, it can also be exalted and purified. If it be possible for us to have a Conscience full of corrupting taint, it is also possible for us to have a Conscience 'void of offence towards God and man.' What is the first step to the possession of a Conscience 'void of offence'? The scriptural

answer is this—the defiled Conscience must be purified. Around every Conscience some measure of corrupting taint has gathered, and the first necessity is that this perverting presence should be removed. The taint cannot be got rid of by any devices of our own creation. The corruption has sunk too deep. The Conscience can be purified only by ‘the blood of sprinkling,’ the ‘sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.’ The deep defiling taint of guilt can be dislodged only by ‘the washing of regeneration.’ We

must bring the sin-perverted, guilt-clogged Conscience to the wondrous grace of God, to all those ineffable powers of renewal which have been made ours by the death of Christ, and the impurity will be surely removed. 'I will restore health unto thee,' saith the Lord our God.

But when Conscience has been purified by sprinkling it will need to be preserved and strengthened, and this can only be attained by the twofold means of discipline and communion. It is all-essential, if we would keep

the moral sense fine, sensitive and discriminating, to enter into fellowship with the refined and refining Spirit of God. By communion we become 'partakers of the divine nature'; we enter into ever-increasing riches of grace, and are 'filled with the knowledge of His will.' With our illuminated 'spirit of judgment' we may then exercise ourselves in the practical things of common life. We must convert light into life, the glory of revelation into 'the beauty of holiness.' We must 'walk in the light' that we may be

‘the children of light.’ Now the best way to discipline the Conscience is to bring its authority into the trifle. We must exercise it in matters about which we have hitherto been morally indifferent. We must be eagerly jealous about the rectitude of the smallest issues of our life. In our moral dispensations we must recognise not only an avoirdupois measure for the just weighing of the hundredweights and the tons, but also an apothecary’s measure for the righteous apportionment of scruples and grains. We must seek to be

‘faithful in that which is least.’
Along these lines we shall surely put on ‘beauty and strength.’ Given a Conscience purified from all taint by ‘the blood of sprinkling,’ and preserved in its purity by ‘the fellowship of the Holy Ghost,’ and receiving daily discipline in ‘the things which are least,’ and we may have a restful assurance that the life in which it dwells will be as ‘a shining light, shining more and more even unto perfect day.’

III

THE STRENGTHENING
OF THE HEART

THE STRENGTHENING OF THE HEART

‘Wait on the Lord . . . and He shall strengthen thine heart.’—Ps. xxvii. 14.

WHAT do we mean by the Heart? In the previous pages we have considered the Will as being the seat of moral force, the centre from which proceeds the power of resistance and persistence. We have regarded the Conscience as the seat of moral instinct, the discriminating faculty in the spheres of character and

conduct. Now, just as the Will is the seat of basal, executive force, and just as the Conscience is the seat of moral instinct, so the Heart is the seat of feeling, the home of emotion, the empire of the sentiments. I want in this chapter to fence off a particular class of feelings, and to ask your attention almost exclusively to these. I wish to discuss what I may call the aristocracy of the feelings. I call them the aristocracy because they possess a certain subtlety of refinement which distinguishes them from others

which are more closely and intimately related to the flesh. Like other aristocracies the members are both good and bad. Envy is a purely spiritual feeling, and may exist in all its intensity even when the vesture of the flesh has been finally dropped. Gratitude is a purely spiritual feeling, and may exist in undiminished power when the flesh has turned to dust. There are other feelings which are largely contingent upon the flesh, and which seek their gratification exclusively in the ways of the flesh.

These will only indirectly concern us in the present discussion. Let us confine the attention to the more ethereal feelings — to feelings more subtle and more refined, more refined in evil and more refined in good. Let us concentrate our thought upon that part of the life where gratitude dwells or ingratitude hides, where flippancy revels or reverence kneels, where pity weeps or indifference reigns, where love moves like a sweet incense or hatred rises like a foul stench. These are types of the feelings which I have

named the aristocracy, which sweeten or infest the upper parts of our being, and which together constitute the inner realm we call the Heart.

Now it is very evident that these feelings appear in different kinds and in varied intensity among different people. That is a very obtrusive fact in human life. If with the Divine vision we could enter into some hearts it would be like passing into a cathedral: everything is so sweet and chaste and reverent and beautiful. But if we entered into other hearts it would be like

passing into a cellar: dark, damp, and forbidding, abounding in vermin and uncleanness. In some hearts the feelings lurk like carrion vultures; in others they sing and soar like the lark. So different are the feelings of different people. They are as unlike as the noontide and the night.

Have we any responsibility as to the character of the feelings which possess the Heart? Has Conscience, the moral palate, any judgment to give concerning the things of the Heart? How far does the authority of Conscience

extend? Is its dominion confined to the regions of thought and speech and deed, or does its jurisdiction reach to the inhabitants of the Heart? Does Conscience pronounce any decision respecting the feelings? Yes, Conscience indicates some feelings, and definitely condemns them. Conscience indicates other feelings, and definitely approves them. Now we have seen that the decision of Conscience involves a command. What Conscience condemns I am commanded to remove. What Conscience approves I

am commanded to entertain. But in the judgments of Conscience there is a larger implication even than this. That which Conscience commands me to remove I have power at hand to remove. Let us mark that well. In the sphere of morals that which is commanded to be done can be done. Somewhere and somehow there is moral power offered to man for the discharge of all his moral obligations. Moral commandments are indications of possible moral attainments. Conscience searches

my heart and commands me to turn out this feeling, and to give more room to that feeling, and to let in another that for long has been standing at the gate. And all this is a solemn indication to me that, according to the teaching of Conscience, I have power over my own Heart, power to receive a certain feeling or to reject it, and that for the exercise of this power I shall be called to account when I stand before the judgment-seat of God.

Conscience then proclaims that we are responsible for our

feelings. Do we recognise the obligation? Let us seek for evidence in our common judgments. Our common judgments recognise that men have power over their own hearts. We condemn a man for ingratitude. We heap upon him severe epithets of censure and contempt. What reason can we offer for the condemnation of men who have no determining choice in their feelings? If we can exercise no dominion over our feelings the ungrateful man should be regarded with tenderest pity as the poor victim of a hard

and petrifying fate. We praise and commend a man because of his warm and bounteous love, because of the bright and sunny influence with which he transforms our dull November seasons into merry days of June. Why should we commend him if men have no power over their own hearts? If his sunny love be his in spite of himself then he is deserving of no peculiar praise for his possession. He is rather to be regarded as a very lucky man, who, by a most fortunate chance, has entered into a golden heritage,

which less lucky men have been denied. But no such element of chance is allowed to enter in and shape and colour our judgments. Our commendations and our condemnations of men are based upon the assumption that the personal sovereignty of man extends to the Heart, that he has large authority over his feelings, and by this recognition we only confirm the decisions of the Conscience. If it were needful to give further elaboration to this it would be easy to detach fragments from our common

speech which clearly indicate that in our practical life we acknowledge that men can exercise sovereignty over the empire of the Heart. For instance, we blame one man for 'allowing his feelings to run away with him,' we commend another for having his feelings 'well under control,' and in these and in many similar phrases we clearly recognise that the sceptre of authority which has been given to man may be wielded, not only over the realms of thought and speech and deed, but also over the domain of the Heart.

I have dwelt upon this truth at considerable length because, although we give it passing recognition in common life, I do not think it receives sufficient emphasis when we are considering the culture of the spiritual life. Let me put the conclusion in the boldest and plainest terms. We have command over the Heart. We have authority over the feelings. Whatever feeling we want we can get. Whatever feeling we do not want we can reject. If we desire the feeling of love we have means to obtain it. If we desire the

feeling of malice it will come at our bidding. This power in the choice of feelings is committed to every man, and for the way in which we exercise it we shall be held responsible on the great day of account.

Now, if this be true, it is surely wise and healthy for us to take thought and consider how feelings are created, how they may be regulated, how they may be fostered and restrained. How, then, are feelings created? Upon what are they dependent? They are largely, if not exclusively,

dependent upon thought. Out of thought there comes feeling, just as fragrance is born of a rose, and a noisome stench of a cesspool. Our sentiments are the exhalations of our thoughts. The Heart is the vessel in which are garnered all the odours which steal from the thoughts in the mind. Every thought tends to create a feeling. There are no thoughts devoid of influence. From every thought there proceeds an influence which goes to the making of a disposition. The fragrance of a single rose in a large room may be im-

perceptible, but, perceptible or not, the sweet influence is there, surely diffusing itself throughout the atmosphere. Bring a score of such roses together, and what was imperceptible in the one becomes a strong and grateful incense in them all. A single thought in the mind may exhale an almost imperceptible influence. But the influence is there, and steals like an intensely subtle odour into the Heart. Let the thoughts be multiplied, and the delicate odours unite to form an intensely powerful influence which we call a feel-

ing, a sentiment, a disposition. But suppose the thought is not like a sweet rose, but like a poisonous nightshade. Here again the influence of a single thought may be too subtle for our detection, but let the thoughts be multiplied, and the poisonous exhalations will unite to form a sentiment of most destructive strength. Let us lay hold of this as a most practical principle in the culture of the spiritual life. We cannot have a good thought and not enrich the Heart. We cannot have an unclean thought and not

poison and embitter the Heart. There is no chance or caprice about the matter. It is governed by immutable law. We cannot have one kind of thought to-day exhaling one kind of feeling, and the same kind of thought to-morrow exhaling another kind of feeling. No; each thought creates its own feeling, and always of one kind. There are certain thoughts which, if we will take them into our minds, will inevitably create the feeling of envy. Take other thoughts into the mind, and from them will be born the sentiment of

jealousy. Take other thoughts into the mind and the Heart will speedily swell with pride. Fill the mind with another kind of thought and in the Heart will gather the sweet and tender sentiment of pity. Each thought creates its own sentiment, and we cannot help it. If we choose the rose we must take the fragrance with it. If we choose the nightshade we must take the stench with it. Take the thought and we must of necessity take the sentiment which the thought creates. Some sentiments gather rapidly. They appear

to attain to mature fulness in a moment. Other sentiments accumulate slowly—the individual influences from the individual thoughts are slowly but surely uniting, and some day, may be after many years, a man awakes to find his Heart possessed by a poisonous passion of whose presence and power he had never dreamed. It often happens that the sentiment of jealousy comes to her throne only after the lapse of many years. On the other hand, anger can mount the throne and govern the life in a day. The mode of its

operation is quite familiar to us. Anger is the distinct and immediate creation of thought. We bring certain thoughts into the mind, and from these thoughts there proceed certain sentiments. We think, and think, and think, and the feeling accumulates and increases with our thought, until at last the Heart is full with feeling, and explodes in violent passion. Let the mind dwell upon certain thoughts and we speedily create the sentiment of anger. Let the mind reject the thoughts and the feelings of anger will never be born.

And so we counsel a man not to think about the injury which he has presumedly suffered, 'not to nurse it,' and by our counsel we imply that with the rejection of the creative thought the created passion will subside. From our thoughts, then, are born our affections and our desires—our desires, the feelings that crave: our affections, the feelings that seek to impart, whether they be of the nature of hatred or love.

Let us advance one step further. Our thought creates our feelings. Our deeds react

upon and strengthen the feelings which by thought were created. My thought plans a kindly deed. Well, the thought itself will most inevitably tend to create a kindly feeling, but the doing of the deed will also assuredly tend to reinforce the feeling. Our deeds react on the feelings which prompted them, and confirm and augment them. 'Blessed are the merciful.' Why? 'For they shall obtain mercy.' Their merciful deeds shall react upon the merciful souls and increase their resources of mercy. The

merciful disposition which urged the merciful deed shall be blessed by the enrichment of itself. That is one way by which our God rewards His children. He rewards our mercifulness by increasing our resources of mercy. He rewards our love by making us more loving. He rewards every act of chasteness by making us more holy. He rewards our deeds by enlarging our hearts. That is the law of our God, and the law finds application on the bad side as well as on the good. Every act of greed strengthens

the feeling of avarice. Every act of impurity intensifies the feeling of lust. Our thought creates our feelings, and our deeds react upon the feelings in quickening and intensifying power.

What, then, is the secret of the culture of the Heart? It is this—we must get back to the origin of feeling. We must get back to imaginations, to ideas, to ideals. As is the mind so will be the Heart. A stony Heart finds its explanation in the mind. A pure Heart may be interpreted in the mind. ‘Set your

mind on things above,' exhorts the Apostle Paul; 'Set your mind on things above,' and your feelings will soar heavenward, like white-winged angels making their way home.

So far I have endeavoured to indicate the mode in which I think feelings are created and the Heart is governed. I have pointed out the way; I have not proclaimed a gospel. There has been little or nothing of 'glad tidings' in the counsel, and counsel without glad tidings is not the gospel of Christ. I have said that the secret of Heart-culture is 'to

set the mind on things above.' It is on those serene and lofty heights that a sound and healthy Heart is to be gained. But that is like saying to some decrepit weakling, who has scarcely strength to crawl along the level ways of the vale, that if he would become healthy and strong he must climb to the mountain-top and live in the home of the sweet and unpolluted air! It may be only a depressing revelation to a man to tell him that health can be found on the wind-swept summit. You bring him a gospel when

you tell him how to get there, how means may be found even for him, however impoverished he may be. 'Set your mind on things above.' There is no gospel in that. I so easily move amid things that are below. By an unseen and mighty gravitation the things that are below drag me down to their level, the level of the vulgar and the earthborn. Is there any gospel which offers to me a heavenly gravitation to counteract the earthly gravitation, some triumphant power which will tug me towards the things that are

above, as this mighty world-power drags me down to things which are below? In this word of the Master I find the gospel I seek: 'I, if I be lifted up, will *draw* . . .' That is the gospel we need. The power to resist the gravitation of worldliness—to 'ascend into the hill of the Lord,' to 'set the mind on things above,' to think and live on the pure and heavenly heights—is to be found in a crucified and exalted Christ. 'I will draw.' Every part of our being will receive the 'upward calling,' and will be

allured into the heavenly places. Committing ourselves to Christ we shall rise with Him, and the mind will share in the resurrection. Drawn by Him we shall rise into 'newness of life.' 'The things that are above' will become more and more entrancingly familiar to us, and we shall find it an increasing joy to gaze upon them with rapt and unwavering vision. With the 'renewing of the mind' we shall be 'transformed': high-born feelings will come to be our guests, and the pervading influence of these fra-

grant sentiments will sweeten
all the common ways in which
we live and move and have
our being.

IV

THE STRENGTHENING
OF THE MIND

THE STRENGTHENING OF THE MIND

‘Bringing every thought into captivity
to the obedience of Christ.’—2 COR. x. 5.

‘THOU shalt love the Lord
thy God . . . with all thy
mind.’ This forms part of a
most comprehensive and all-
inclusive demand. I am com-
manded to love the Lord my
God with all my Heart—with
all the wealth of tenderest
affection, with chastened senti-
ment and refined emotion ;

with all my Soul—with all the powers of a converted and reinforced will; and with all my Mind—with all the strength of reason, the vigilant energy of purified and cultured thought. Now, how can I love the Lord with my Mind? By using the Mind. Love never buries her talents. She uses all she has got and hungers for more. Love yearns for multiplied powers of expression. She turns all her gifts into channels by which she may communicate her own fulness, and no power does she permit to lie in indolent disuse. Moth and

rust never settle down on love's possessions. Moth and rust are the close attendants on fear. It is fear who wraps her powers in a napkin. It is fear who buries her talents in the earth. It is fear who hides, and by hiding wastes her gifts. 'Fear hath torment.' But 'perfect love casteth out fear.' Love lays hold of all her faculties, and concerning each and every one she seeks to fulfil the Divine commission—'Trade ye herewith till I come'; 'Put this in the bank, that at my coming I may receive mine own with

usury.' So love invests all the powers of the being. She puts them into active currency. She speculates. She plans. She reasons. She explores. She trades in the subtle merchandise of thought, and seeks thereby to acquire a great fortune of divine truth and practical wisdom. She loves the Lord God with the Mind.

But will not the bold exercise of the Mind impair the delicate perfection of faith? Does not faith assume its most regal dignity when reason is most restrained? These are not unnecessary questions.

They embody a doubt which lurks in many lives, and which represents these two great powers of life as pronounced and irreconcilable antagonists. But giving them their scriptural interpretations, is there in reality anything irreconcilable between reason and faith? Without reason there can be no reasonable faith; without faith there can be no consistent and far-reaching reason. To increase the power of the one is to provide a stronger helpmeet for the other. They are not opponents: they are purposed to be intimate and

reciprocal helps. Read the epistles of the Apostle Paul. There we have the matured utterances of a man 'rich in faith,' exulting in faith, ever proclaiming the necessity of faith as a cardinal factor in the Christian life. And what about reason? Is reason maimed and restrained? The extraordinary intellectual splendour of the epistles has formed a constant allurements for men of superlative powers of mind. Coleridge was wont to say that the Epistle to the Romans is the finest piece of reasoning in the broad domain of litera-

ture. Paul allowed his Mind to move freely and reverently amid the great mysteries, searching for the reasons of things. He brought the vast wealth of his intellectual resources and consecrated it to the pursuit of righteousness and truth. He did not seek to increase his faith by starving his reason. He contemplated the august verities of the Christian religion with reverent, inquiring gaze, and he sought to clearly understand what he so firmly possessed.

Now this I think to be one

of the great needs of to-day. We need a more decisive consecration of the Mind. We need some good, clear, honest individual thinking. We need to take words, which are too often spoken with superficial and impotent vagueness, and think ourselves down into their definite and essential content. Take, for instance, words like life, death, sin, holiness, faith, belief, love, salvation—all of which are vital terms in the Christian religion—how few of even professing Christians have any clear, forceful, transferable conception of their

meanings ! How comparatively rare are the believers who are able to give a luminous reason for 'the hope that is in them' ! The horizon even of the most spacious mind is not very remote. Before every life the veil drops down with its most commanding hint of mystery. But there are many of us who have added to inevitable mystery an unnecessary cloudiness which could be largely dissipated by the honest and energetic exercise of the Mind. We have followed the same principle in religion which some-

times actuates children in their play. We have 'opened our mouths, and closed our eyes, to see what God would send us.' Well, that is not in the line of our Lord's desires. He seeks not only the open mouth but the open eye. He wants our religious life to be more than a sentiment: He wants it to be an apprehension. He wants it to be more than a passive reception: He wants it to be an active perception. He wants us to love Him not only with all the Heart but with all the Mind, with all the powers of intelligence,

with awake and consecrated thought.

A cultured Mind is part of the beauty of holiness, and, therefore, to cultivate the Mind is part of the duty of a holy life. Along what large guiding lines may the culture proceed? Let us keep to the great highways and seek the counsel of Scripture as to what constitutes the primary characteristics of a cultured Mind.

No one can read the Bible with hearty attention without being greatly impressed by the emphasis with which it proclaims the necessity of a

lowly mind. In various guises the counsel is repeated on almost every page that men should cultivate a lowly Mind, a reverent Mind, a Mind that moves softly, that knocks gently, often bowing in its search as though impressed with the great mystery that hides behind all things. One of the distinguishing characteristics of a cultured Mind is its awed perception of mystery. It perceives the veiled as well as the unveiled, and it enters all the more fully into the glory of the apocalypse because of its sub-

duing sense of the Presence which is hid. The haughty Mind has no effective sense of the mysterious, and therefore never enters into the full and fruitful possession of truth. We are fitted and qualified to receive revelations only when we are solemnly sensible of the great secret which shrouds itself behind the veil. There is, therefore, need that men, who are setting out in quest of truth, should heed the counsel of the days of old, and take their shoes from off their feet. Surely in this counsel there is significance for every age. We

must take the shoes from off our feet. We must tread softly, as it were on tiptoe, with a hushed expectancy, that we may not miss the smallest Voice that speaks out of the secret place. We must step reverently and quietly up to the most familiar bush if, perchance, it may unveil to us some secret Presence of the Lord. Our peril to-day is that we so rarely remove our shoes. We tramp about loudly among the most sacred things. We search into things with blunt and irreverent thoughtlessness.

We handle them with an almost commercial familiarity, and the consequence is that we never discover their wealth. The surest way to miss anything great is to trifle with it. No man long retains a sense of the awful and the august whose life is a succession of flippant and thoughtless familiarities. He sees the common bush; he does not detect the mystic, burning Presence. He does not discover the Secret, for 'the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him.'

I do not therefore deem

it at all irrelevant to urge the cultivation of the lowly, reverent Mind which suspects and discerns the mystery in that which is apparently commonplace. One of the most distinguished statesmen of our day has recently declared his conviction that the great characteristics of modern life are triviality and secularity. I am not aware what precise significance the speaker himself attached to the terms he used, but if the words receive their ordinary and common interpretation I think they express very truly

the prominent features of our time. Our life is marked by triviality, by an abiding in the remote and unimportant outskirts of things. Our interests are fragmentary. In great pursuits we only dabble. There is a want of strong, consistent purpose, a lack of dogged consecutiveness in the pursuit of the deeper things of life, resulting in a multitude of loose and detached trivialities which are altogether alien to the true dignity and glory of human life. It is equally true that modern life is characterised by secularity.

I am afraid that we are being increasingly tyrannised by a hard and very prosy practicality. There is a growing abhorrence of sentiment. Life is losing its mystical elements and its poetic graces. Life for many is only a superficies, with no suggestion of heights or depths. With the loss of the heights and the depths there is a corresponding decline of reverence and awe. The heights vanish when men cease to be lowly. Secularity reigns when reverence dies. But when secularity reigns culture is maimed. Our capacity to

bow is the measure of our dignity. Our disposition to stoop determines our power to soar. When we cease to revere we have lost the key of interpretation, and the book of revelation is closed.

I would urge, then, as the first ambition of mental culture, a lowly and a reverent Mind. Reverence can be trained, but, like every other high and worthy accomplishment, it demands assiduous care. 'I have a plant called reverence,' says the beloved and genial Autocrat, 'and it needs constant watering.' Yes,

and it is possible for us to water the plant every day. We need not wait for some mighty and phenomenal contingency to cultivate our sense of reverence and of awe. It is best and most safely trained by smaller cultures, by the influence of the apparent trifle. Let us seek to train it while standing before the commonplace. Let us take the shoes from off our feet when we approach a familiar bush. Let us bow in low obeisance when God presents Himself to us in the guise of a common carpenter. When we take a

crust of bread into our hands let us contemplate it with a reverence which will turn the common meal into a sacramental feast. Let us cultivate a reverent, lowly Mind, and even the least of God's creations will be greatly significant with the mystic presence of the King.

But it is not only a lowly Mind which is commended in the Christian Scriptures. We are enjoined to cultivate a 'ready mind,' and to seek it as a mental disposition which is part of the wealth of a strong and consecrated life. 'They received the word with

all readiness of mind.' What is a ready Mind? We have a sufficiently near equivalent in our familiar phrase, 'an open mind,' a Mind whose expectancy is alert, and whose hospitable doors are ajar to any angel presence who may present himself for entertainment. There is a sentence in the book of Ezekiel which appears to me to offer a fitting symbol of a ready Mind. 'The glory of the Lord came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east.' The ready Mind has gates and windows 'whose

prospect is toward the east,' toward the place of dawn, of new light, of new revelation, of new glory. It is the attitude of an expectant optimism. Pessimism has all its gates and windows facing the west: its prospect is toward the dying day, whose ministry is fading and spent. The ready Mind is the posture of a calm optimism, watching the east for the fuller 'glory of the Lord,' expecting 'more light and truth to break forth from His most holy word.'

The opposite of a ready Mind is a closed Mind. We

speak in familiar language of having 'made up our minds.' That is well and wise if the decision indicates an illumined conviction with one window still open toward the east. But I am afraid that a 'mind made up' too frequently means a closed Mind, with all its windows double-shuttered, excluding every possibility of the entrance of the sweet and entreating light. The mercy, which is 'new every morning,' is ignored ; angel-presences knock unheeded ; and the apocalypse of new dawns is never seen. Such a made-up Mind

is not entitled to use the spacious word 'conviction.' Convictions are 'children of the light.' The only appropriate name is 'bigotry,' which is a child of the twilight and the night, only putting up extra shutters when 'the morning stars sing together' as the heralds of a larger and more glorious day.

You remember how John Bunyan describes this darkening of the understanding and closing of the Mind : 'Diabolus thought not fit to let My Lord Understanding abide in his former lustre and glory, be-

cause he was a seeing man. Wherefore he darkened it, not only by taking from him his office and power, but by building a high and strong tower just between the sun's reflections and the windows of My Lord's palace ; by which means his house and all, and the whole of his habitation, were made as dark as darkness itself. And thus, being alienated from the light, he became as one that was born blind.' All of which means that darkness and disease are in deep and intimate partnership—'Darkness hath blinded

their eyes.' If we would preserve our sight, and be saved from 'the pestilence that walketh in darkness,' we must keep a ready Mind, a Mind that is open toward the divine, ever expectant of new outpourings of the 'light of life.' Our Master has yet 'many things to say' unto us. When will the new revelation break? We do not know. How will the new light come? We cannot tell. Perhaps it will come through the winsome presence of a little child. Perhaps it will break upon us from the weak-

ness and frailties of an old man. Perhaps it may come from a quarter that we have almost despised. The revelation may be enshrined in the speech of the foolish. It may dawn upon us in the mysterious presence of death. It may stream from an open grave. Let us cultivate a ready Mind. Let us have all the watchfulness of love. Let us 'love His appearing.' 'Be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh.'

Lastly, in moral and spiritual culture we must seek not only

for reverence and readiness, but also for loftiness of Mind. 'Set your mind on things above.' Contemplate lofty themes. Let your thoughts move among the august and sublime. Don't let them grovel among the mire. It is a heartening truth that the Mind can be trained to feel so much at home among things that are pure as to feel orphaned and lonely when the pure is absent. I can so accustom my lungs to pure air that foul air immediately creates a sense of suffocation. On the other hand, by much famili-

arity—I can so habituate myself to foul air that it no longer assails me as repulsive, but becomes my natural element. We can become ‘acclimatised’ to the pure or the impure. The same experience prevails in the realm of the Mind. The Mind can become naturalised to the unclean. The Mind can become so familiar with images and imaginations that are defiled and defiling as to be quite at home in uncleanness. The Mind can become so habituated to filthy books as to cease to crave for the clean.

On the other hand, the Mind may have such close companionship with the lofty that the sordid appears as a sharp and painful offence. The Mind can become naturalised to the holy. Its citizenship may be in heaven. It may wear the white robes.

‘Set your mind on things above,’ and let us carefully see to it that the things *are* above. Let us save ourselves from any subtle delusions. Let us set our minds on things that are real, but let the real be more than the merely realistic. Let us set our minds on

things that are true, but let the true be more than the merely veracious. A filthy story may be veracious, but let us never call it true. 'I am the Truth.' A thing is true only when it is in harmony with Christ. Among those higher harmonies the healthy Mind must move. Let the Mind dwell upon those presences which are 'worthy to stand before the Son of Man.' 'Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honourable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are

lovely, whatsoever things are of good report: if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.'

Cultivate a reverent Mind.

'With the lowly is wisdom.'

Cultivate a ready Mind.

'Blessed is the man that heareth Me, watching daily

at My gates, waiting at the posts of My doors.' Cultivate

a lofty Mind. 'Stand upon the mount before the Lord.'

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